

Questions about Social Media Posed by the MAP Group, June 2009

Responses provided by New Breed Marketing, Rachel Carter PR, and Christine Werneke, Chief Marketing Officer.

1. Is there research on the effectiveness of social media helping to achieve communication/marketing goals?

- a. This question is being asked in the context of making a justification for the investment in time of limited staff/resources. Does evidence exist to help convince decision makers that using social media can deliver value?**

Research does exist on social media and includes specific topics of who is using it, how much use is it getting by various age cohorts/demographics, what are various segments using it for, plus many other areas. The *Pew Internet & American Life Project* is a good resource for information on use of the internet in general (see www.pewinternet.org)

It is one of seven projects that make up the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan, nonprofit "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world. The Project produces reports exploring the impact of the internet on families, communities, work and home, daily life, education, health care, and civic and political life.

2. How do we know what's coming next?

- a. Again, what is the risk of investing in a particular social media tool (i.e. Facebook, Twitter) that will quickly be replaced with a new tool?**
- b. Alternatively, do we see any other social media tools emerging in the marketplace that we should focus on?**

The challenge with the social media realm is that it is constantly changing; new tools are being quickly developed and deployed. The best way to know how the social media world changes is to be actively engaging in it, then the changes are natural in the day-to-day use of it. Since utilizing social media only works when used in an ongoing manner, the use of it solves the problem of not knowing what to engage in next.

It is impossible to make a recommendation on tools without an understanding of the product and message you are trying to communicate and who the target market is. This is also true for traditional forms of marketing.

3. What audiences are we reaching with each tool?

a. Are there statistics that provide demographics, psychographics for social media users?

There is a growing amount of data becoming available on social media users. The Pew ResearchCenter (cited in Q#1) provides some good data. You can also search the web for specific data and research for each tool (ie. Facebook, twitter, Linked-in).

Different social media applications also have tools which can help determine some of this information. For example, Facebook allows administrators of business and organization pages to review insights and blogs can be registered with blog search engine directories which allow for reader trackings.

If a social media tool offers advertising, detailed market info or demographic and psychographic information may be available from the platform directly.

It is recommended that you perform some basic internet searches to find the specific information you are looking for.

4. In Vermont, who is using these tools?

In Vermont there are a number of companies that do use social media tools. Below is a sample of some Vermont companies and organizations that have a presence in social media.

	Facebook	Twitter	Blog
Green Mountain Coffee	✓	✓	✓
Seventh Generation	✓	✓	✓
Vtrim	✓	✓	✓
Burlington Free Press	✓	✓	✓
Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce	✓	✓	
VPR	✓	✓	
Shelburne Farms	✓	✓	
Winooski Public Library	✓	✓	✓
City Market	✓	✓	
Simon Pierce Glass	✓	✓	✓

A US Census Bureau 2007 study found a combined use of the internet (home and work) at 75%. The same study also found the average of no internet use in the home at 18%.

The Vermont Facebook fan page has over 21,000 fans. Vermont Public Radio has over 2,000 fans. The Vermont Children's Aid Society and the Lund Family Center both have close to 100 fans.

5. Are there time saving techniques for using social media?

a. For example, integrating a Twitter feed into your website; using RSS to push out or collect information

Yes, there are tools which allow social media tools to be syndicated with other tools and there are some time saving techniques to using social media. However, it would depend on what tools are necessary to reach the identified target market.

One thing to remember is that Social Media isn't free, the costs to using social media versus other media outlets have just been transferred from purchasing media to personnel costs and administrative costs. It is time consuming and there does need to be a cost/responsibility shift to be able to effectively incorporate social media into marketing and traditional public relations.

6. How do you measure outcomes?

a. How will we know if the PR campaign had an impact on behavior change?

There are a number of ways to measure the success of a campaign. The tools to do this and the metrics involved will depend on the specific details and tools used in the campaign. They can be as broad as watching spikes in sales as different tools are put into place to as specific as using a software package to track how customers are interacting with your online brand.

As with traditional PR, social media directly effects awareness and from there the indirect result is behavior change. The measurement of behavior change is still as abstract as with traditional PR. However, tracking the results of raising awareness using social media provides more concrete measurement than in traditional PR through some of the tools social media applications have built into their programs and through the ability to search the internet. Social media is so much more effective than simply using traditional PR (especially if the two are used in combination and piggy-back off one another) that the awareness raising results are experienced first hand by those operating the social media components.

7. Is there guidance/advice that you can give on using blogs to communicate information on change?

- a. **This question was posed by Department of Education who is currently using blogs and is considering using a blog as a platform to communicate about change in state education.**

Best practices for blogging from New Breed Marketing:

- Blogs have a practice of linking to other blogs as references. This is encouraged as other bloggers will be inclined to reciprocate. Updates should be made with a sense of consistency.
- SEO-specific:
 - Keyword Density: If the post has keywords that relate to the Departments desired keyword list, the keyword density should fall between 5 and 6% for the post.
 - Titles should be formed with search in mind - (ex: Accutane Warnings would turn into FDA issues Accutane Warnings.)
 - If there are accompanying pictures they must be named properly. (ex: image01.jpg would become Vermont-Department-of-XXXXX-talks-to-media.jpg)
 - Bolded and highlighted text: Often times search engine will see bolded and highlighted text as 'more important'. This SEO technique should be used with discretion.
 - Backend: There are plugins that we configure that are SEO specific. They include modifying the page title, the page name and the meta description and meta keywords for each post.
- Also, the below links are helpful resources. It's the top 25 list of bloggers who actually write about blogging. Some give SEO tips, some give tips on making money by blogging, some give tips on reaching their audience. These links are just for reference so you have an idea of how much information the "best practices" could involve.
- Top 25 blogs that are about blogging
<http://www.dailyblogtips.com/top-25-blogs-about-blogging/>
- #1 on the list above.
<http://www.prologger.net/>

Another set of tips from Rachel Carter PR

- Is Not A Way to Publicize What You May Want in a Press Release – if your press releases aren't getting picked up, it's because the information isn't newsworthy and/or your distribution methods are not working
- Keep the Confusing Marketing Language Off the Blog – unless the blog is about marketing, the language needs to be everyday or it will not be read
- Spreading the News – Blogs are used to spread news, but news that is pertinent to the audience, NOT what YOU want to be pertinent to your audience
- The Changing Audience – Let your audience define your audience, not who you want the audience to be and write to those who read the blog

- Be A Reporter – Blogs are a great way to act as a reporter in your community – share positive news of others and use the blog to promote your marketing efforts by utilizing keywords
- Before You Begin – If you were a newspaper editor, would you hire someone who has never read a newspaper? The same is true with a blog - begin by getting engaged in blogs; take an area you are personally interested in outside of your work and find a few blogs on it, subscribe to them, tinker with using social media bookmarks like Digg and Delicious, and comment on the blogs while figuring out how to share with others in your social networks, like Facebook or Twitter
- Do Not Fear the Blog – if your messaging is consistent, it will not be lost
- You Do Not Need To Be A Computer Wiz – You do not need to know HTML to blog, only how to insert hyperlinks, insert photos, and insert already created HTML codes from social networking sites – if these terms sound confusing, you need to spend some time reading blogs and navigating social networking sites to get you acclimated
- The Blogger Must Like Writing – A blog is personal and is a voice from within the agency, company, or organization – the author or authors of a blog must be able to write and actually enjoy it or the blog will be forced and not authentic and will fail

8. How can we use RSS feeds to push timely communications?

- a. **Can RSS be used as an alternative to an e-mail newsletter? (This Department was explaining that maintaining an e-mail distribution list was cumbersome and time consuming. An opt-in or subscriber based communication would be preferred so that the contact list is no longer an issue.)**

As mass communication is now a part of history, giant email lists should not be used in the same way. Smaller lists which reach different target audiences should be created from the email list and used when there is information appropriate to that audience. RSS feeds should be used in the online distribution of news on websites and with press release news feeds. RSS feeds and email marketing work in collaboration with one another, they do not cancel one another out.

9. How do you do mobile messaging? How do you use it?

If the target audience is very defined and they have opted into receiving messages, it may be appropriate. Using it as a way to blanket out a mass message is ineffective and unwelcome.

There are a number of vendors that can handle the technical aspect of cuing up messages to be sent out to cell phones.